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ABSTRACT

Since 1970, the University of Chicago has offered three undergraduate anthropology courses on Philippine Negrito and Malay and Thai aboriginal black populations. Between 1975 and 1981, 72 students, including American blacks, Filipinos, and other Asians, attended the courses. The instructor's observations of students' responses to the courses indicated that minority students responded negatively to presentations of nudity, poverty, and lack of hygiene among the groups being studied, and to the generally racist treatment of Asian black groups in the anthropological literature. To a great extent, rejection of Asian anthropology courses by minority students can be attributed to the quality of anthropology that has been practiced by its contributors in their writings on Southeast Asia. What is needed is a high quality of anthropology that questions the assumptions that all Negrito populations may be lumped together as one group. Instead, each group should be identified by the name the group calls itself, described by phenotype and genotype, and recognized as having a distinct culture. Thorough and methodologically-sound ethnography/ethnology must be developed to replace inaccurate generalizations offered by previous investigations, and to provide non-racist material that can be used to train perceptive and sensitized students. (Author/MJL)

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MINORITY STUDENT RESPONSE

TO THE

ANTHROPOLOGY OF ASIAN BLACK POPULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Minority Student Response to the Anthropology of Asian Black populations. Charles P. Warren, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

Philippine Negrito groups and Malay and Thai aboriginal black populations are well-documented examples of hunting and collecting societies in the anthropological literature. These groups get considerable emphasis in three Southeast Asian area courses taught in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. An assessment of minority student response to the Asian Black content of these courses provides some insight as to why Southeast Asian Area courses do not attract minority students.

Introduction

Although the title of my paper is "Minority Student Response to the Anthropology of Asian Black Populations," the scope of the paper is considerably wider. As the title promises, I will discuss my perceptions of minority student reaction to Philippine Negrito materials and the ethnography of Malay and Thai aboriginal black populations. Both of these groups get considerable attention in all three of the Asian Studies courses I teach, and they are important components of the contents of the courses, since they are well-documented examples of hunting and collecting societies. However, the latter portions of this paper consist of a critique of the anthropological methods traditionally used when discussing black populations, and I will try to relate the described anthropological methodology to minority student attitudes.

After teaching courses in anthropology for twenty-five years at the University of Illinois at Chicago, one would think that by now I would have accumulated and compiled considerable data that would provide insights and perceptions concerning student responses to my courses. Such is not the case, and what follows is highly impressionistic and subjective. Furthermore, the assumptions I make in this paper are admittedly biased. One obvious bias is that I think that I am a good teacher. A second bias is that I am a member of a minority group whose members frequently identify strongly with black populations, especially those from Africa, from whom Afro-American Blacks historically have descended.

A third bias is the fact that one of the groups in the Philippines with whom I did my basic ethnographic field work is a black Asian population—the Batak of Palawan. It is from the work in the field with this group that the major segment of my ethnographic publications has emerged (Warren 1959, 1961, 1964, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1977).

Consequently, in the early years of my teaching, the introductory level cultural anthropology courses all contained heavy components of Philippine ethnography, with considerable emphasis on the Tagbanuwa and the Batak, the two groups I came to know

well in Palawan. Obviously some of my students were impressed by the explicitness of my audio-visual presentations, for just this past year a reunion of former students and faculty at the Chicago Undergraduate Division of the University of Illinois was held in Chicago, and several of my former students from the early years remembered me well as the anthropologist who routinely showed slides of topless natives long before such revelations became popular on the local newsstands and in selected movie theaters.

Anthropology Courses with Asian Black Population Content

Through the years I carried the burden of a variety of introductory courses, but as new faculty members were added to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, my responsibilities were reduced, and in 1970 I developed a new course, "Ethnography of the Philippines," a course I have taught at least once a year during my years in residence since its inception. The catalog description of the course is as follows: a survey of selected indigenous cultures of the Philippine Islands, with emphasis on subsistence patterns and social organization. In this course I tried to link my field experiences in Palawan, in the Mountain Province of Luzon, and in urban Manila of the early 1950's with appropriate anthropological monographs that discussed identical, similar, or related groups in the Philippines. However, in this course there was also a strong infusion of field data on the Batak of Palawan, a black population of insular Southeast Asia. Remember, this was "my" group, and like most ethnographers, I did (and do) identify very strongly with the people among whom I had my first field experiences.

In 1973 I went to Thailand, South Viet Nam, and Kampuchea, and I combined my twenty-one month work tour for the American government with an in-country study of additional Asian populations, one being the Semang of southern Thailand. The Semang are also Asian black populations.

When I returned from Thailand the Department of Anthropology requested me to develop two additional ethnography courses on Southeast Asia. The first of these

courses, "The Ethnography of Southeast Asia," is a survey of selected cultures of mainland Southeast Asia, with emphasis on ecology and cultural dynamics. One additional Asian black population, the Semai, reported in the literature by Denton (1968), gets considerable emphasis in this course. The Semai provide excellent examples of Southeast Asian hunters and collectors, or residual populations in remote environmental enclaves.

The second of these courses, "Problems in Southeast Asian Ethnology," is a survey of selected indigenous and minority populations of mainland and insular Southeast Asia, with emphasis on culture change and processes of integration. Two Asian black populations, the Negritos of Malaya (= the Semang) and the Andamanese, as summarized by Burling (1965), are discussed as examples of hunting and gathering tribes, and also as examples of residual populations that may link modern populations to the earlier populations of the Asian Upper Pleistocene.

The course on the Philippines and the Southeast Asian ethnography course are aimed at undergraduate students, e.g., 200-level, and the problems course is designed for advanced undergraduates, e.g., 300-level. All three of the courses are cross-listed with courses in the Asian Studies Program.

During the introductory lectures of the three courses I discuss the geographic distributions of equatorial black populations of the Eastern Hemisphere as they have been reported in mainland South and Southeast Asia, insular South and Southeast Asia, and in the islands of the Western Pacific, as contrasted with the Asiatic Mongoloid and other populations of these regions. I do this to establish the heterogeneity of physical types in these regions of the world. Contrary to popular beliefs, I suggest to my students that there may be some rationale for this distribution other than accidental, and I even go so far as to intimate that the black populations of Asia and the Western Pacific may have some real relationship with earlier black populations of Africa. Of course this kind of thinking is anthropological heresy, for the geneticists and others have "proven" that black populations in Asia and

the Western Pacific are unrelated to their African phenotypic counterparts. However, undergraduate students have formulated no opinions about this kind of theoretical construct, so the concepts can at least be presented to them with minimum or no resistance.

Ethnic Composition of Classes and Minority Students

Table 1 is a compilation of data drawn from Final Grade Rosters of three courses, Anthropology 267 = Asian Studies 233, Anthropology 268 = Asian Studies 234, and Anthropology 369 = Asian Studies 369. The time period covered is from Fall Quarter, 1975, through Spring Quarter, 1981, and since the focus of this paper is on minority student response, the ethnic groups specified in the table are Black, Filipino, and Other ("Other" meaning American White unless otherwise specified in the Notes).

I selected Final Grade Rosters as the source for this data, because the students listed on the rosters have finished the courses and, thus, will have provided me with the maximum contact with them during which I may (or may not) have gained their impressions of the contents of the courses to some degree. However, it must be noted that students who enroll in your courses and then withdraw after several weeks of classroom work are also sending strong signals to you about your courses. Conversely, students who take several of your courses are also imparting information to you, and others, about the quality of your courses, but these data are quite subtle.

Table 1 reveals that over a seven-year period I have had a total of seventy-two students in the three courses under consideration. Of this total, six have been American Black students, twenty have been Filipino students, thirty-eight have been American White students, and eight have been Asian students from assorted countries. Admittedly, this is a small sample, but I feel that I have a high level of interaction with most of my students, so I am justified in making some assumptions about their responses to the contents of the courses.

Minority Student Responses to Asian Black Populations

In general, minority students respond negatively to four powerful phenomena: nudity; poverty; lack of hygiene; and racism. I will discuss the first three concepts briefly, and then I will devote the remainder of this paper to an assessment of racism as it appears in the anthropological literature on Southeast Asia.

Nudity and semi-nudity in Southeast Asian black populations is usually the rule rather than the exception, and it is revealed to the student in movies, slides, videotapes, photographs, and ethnographic descriptions of the dress and attire of the group under discussion. In university classrooms that are ethnically mixed, an undercurrent of laughter and sotto voce remarks usually occurs at the initial presentation of explicit movies, videotapes, and slides. American White students do not seem to be upset by the revelations of exposed surface anatomy, but black and other non-white minority students sense that the humor generated by the nudity is also being directed toward them, since the anthropological films, videotapes, and transparencies never show white populations nude or semi-nude in their daily activities. Black students have come to my office and complained about the excessive use of black and brown populations as the ethnographic examples portrayed in the audio-visual presentations of the introductory anthropology courses. These students are offended, and their offense arises not from their prudery but from their knowledge of the attitudes of the non-minority students in the classes, i.e., that people without shirts, trousers, and other items of "proper" attire are at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. This introduces the next concept, poverty.

Only the eyes of the romantic anthropologist see the hunting and collecting populations of the world as societies that have achieved a remarkable balance between their cultural adaptations and the ecosystem in which they exist. All others view them as being extremely poor, and minority students do not identify with poverty or with populations that are at the lower end of the technological scale. The fact that a band of urban American Black males was arrested in a park on the

lakefront of Chicago for hunting rabbits with clubs and spears reveals the prevailing attitudes in American society concerning hunters and collectors. These same attitudes are manifest in the minds of some students in our university classrooms.

Lack of hygiene, and its companion concept, lack of sanitation, are the principal factors leading to culture shock when an anthropologist, or anyone else of a different cultural background, attempts to work in the field with hunters and collectors. The student experiences culture shock of a different magnitude when exposed to the anthropological literature and to the films, videotapes, slides, and photographs of the life-style of hunters and collectors. Of course the smells, the tastes, and the bodily contacts are missing, but well-written ethnography and high-quality audio-visual media can be very realistic. Again, it is black and brown people being portrayed in these unsanitary, unhygienic conditions, and minority students reject both a personal identification with these groups being portrayed and an identification with these groups by others who hold broad stereotypes. This brings us to the concept of racism.

Racism in the Anthropological Literature about Asian Black Populations

Black populations in mainland and insular Southeast Asia are minority populations, and they have been treated as such in the anthropological literature. The most blatant examples can be drawn from the anthropological accounts of Negrito groups in the Philippine Islands. The historical record establishes the fact that all of the short-statured, dark-skinned, and woolly-haired peoples of the Philippines have been anthropologically lumped together as constituting a single group. Further, they have been designated by one name, Negrito (= small and black in color), even though the geographic areas occupied by these groups are not contiguous, and some of the groups are separated one from another by 800 to 1,000 miles of both land and water. In spite of improved anthropological methodology, this practice has been maintained and fostered by both Euro-American and Filipino anthropologists from the early 1900's to the present day. In addition, the "Negrito Problem" has

predicated that present-day aboriginal black populations were at one time more widespread in South and Southeast Asia and that they constituted an earlier population that was relatively homogeneous; therefore the search for common culture, common language, and common origins has influenced the research efforts of both the ethnographers and the physical anthropologists who have grappled with the "Negrito Problem." (For the many facets of the discussion of the "Negrito Problem," see Baumgartner 1975a:283-4, 1975b:284-5, 1977:99-100; Barnouw 1975:174-76; Birdsell 1972:515-17; Bleibtreu 1969:265-67; Brace 1965:271-79; Coon 1965:173-83; Harrison 1969:67-8; Howells 1967:331-40; Hulse 1971:364-5, 368-72; Peterson 1980; Rahmann 1956:741-2, 1963:137-57, 1965:322-8, 1975:204-36; and Rahmann and Maceda 1955a, 1955b, 1958, 1962.)

Unsuccessful in their search for common culture, language, and origin, the anthropologists have maligned the aboriginal black populations by attributing their languages and cultures to those borrowed from their Asiatic Mongoloid neighbors, and, further, they have reduced the inventory of their original cultural artifacts to a short list that does not include the stone blade or point, the bow and arrow, the blowpipe, or the spear--artifacts that are basic to many hunting and collecting societies and all tool kits that have appeared elsewhere in the archaeological record of the Upper Pleistocene and early holocene of Asia.

I need not go into more detail concerning the poor, non-standard ethnographic methodology that has been used traditionally when considering the aboriginal black populations of the Philippine Islands and other regions of Southeast Asia, but the anthropological literature describing Philippine Negritos, beginning with Kroeber (1928) and reiterated by LeBar (1975), all voices the same theme--Negrito peoples are without their own language and culture, and they are parasitic in relation with their neighbors. In addition, they are called Pygmies, a term that more than suggests that their short stature separates them from other modern humans, while, in reality, the stature of the so-called Negrito groups is well within the range of short-statured populations in other parts of the world.

Other ethnographers, e.g., Cadelina (1973, 1974, 1978, 1980 [the Ata of Negros]), Eder (1977a, 1977b, 1978 [the Batak of Palawan]), Estioko (1975 [the Ebuked Agta of Northeastern Luzon]), Fox (1952 [the Pinatubo Negritos]), Maceda (1975 [the Mamanua of Mindanao]), [redacted] Oracion (1960 [the Ata of Negros]), Peterson (1978 [the Agta of Northeastern Luzon]), Rahmann, Maceda and Lopez (1973 [the Ata of Negros]), and Warren (1964 [the Batak of Palawan]), have tried to present a more objective ethnographic picture of the black populations in the Philippines, but the established tradition is still being maintained by the trend-setters in anthropology. This observation easily can be verified by examining the early ethnographic maps of the Philippines prepared by Beyer and Tangco (1951) that show the distribution of Negrito groups in the Philippine Islands and then comparing the early maps with the maps that have been compiled more recently by LeBar (1975), Fox and Flory (1974), and Tenazas and Ramas (1979). The same view is reflected in all of the maps, even though they span over 70 years of Philippine ethnography. Underlying this perspective is the assumption that all short-statured, black populations should be lumped together, regardless of the cultural differences they may display.

What I have described is a racist approach, and minority students recognize racism in its many forms, no matter how subtle it may be, for minority students in America have ample experience with covert and overt racism as it is practiced, preached, and legislated by other Americans. Thus, racism in the anthropological literature is easily discerned, especially since there is so much of it, and minority students react negatively to it.

Correcting the Ethnographic Record

It is obvious from the above account that the rejection of anthropologically-oriented Asian Studies courses by minority students can be attributed to a great extent to the kind and quality of anthropology that customarily has been practiced and documented by the major contributors to the anthropological literature on Southeast Asia. If such is the case, then how can the situation be improved?

One essential need is high-quality ethnography that questions the orthodoxy of certain assumptions. For instance--
Negrito populations are short, dark-skinned, and have woolly or "peppercorn" hair. Since there are several populations in the Philippines and the Malay Peninsula with the physical characteristics just described, then these several populations must have a common origin and a common pre-Malay culture. This assumption is not an anthropological assumption, but a number of anthropologists, early and recent, have been influenced by this idea. However, clear-thinking anthropologists know that there are many human groups that resemble one another physically but have cultures that vary. Ecological adaptation is the basis for this cultural variation. Physical types also change through time, with natural selection, isolation, genetic drift, and mutation being the processes usually deemed responsible for these changes (but notice that variation among Negrito groups is usually attributed to intergroup mixture--the assumption here being that they would have remained unchanged physically from their original phenotype if they had not come in contact with other Southeast Asian types).

Instead of following tradition and looking for a "pure" Negrito type (in Luzon, in Malaya, or the Andaman Islands), the tactic should be to carefully describe both the phenotype and the genotype of every group as a distinct group. Furthermore, the terms Negrito, Pygmy, etc., should be replaced by the name or names by which each group identifies itself. In addition, the members of the individual groups must be viewed as being full members of the species Homo sapiens (since they easily interbreed with their neighbors and anyone else who manages to have sex with them), who happen to be at the lower end of the stature scale, at the dark end of the skin color spectrum, and with a hair type that appears in black populations in several places in the world. To document the range of phenotype, I recommend that the literature be carefully gleaned for the photographs of short, dark, frizzly-haired populations in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia to see how closely they resemble one another. We have had too much classificatory activity by

non-anthropologists and anthropologists who have never seen a Negrito. So much for physical type.

The second problem has to do with culture. Even if short, dark, woolly-haired Upper Pleistocene peoples arrived in Southeast Asia as a single group with a common culture, the original members and subsequent generations must have spread throughout the accessible regions of mainland and insular Southeast Asia, and each splinter group found itself in a new (and different) ecological niche. Cultural adaptation began immediately, and the processes leading to cultural variation continued to operate. This model is also applicable to linguistics. If these same populations under discussion were later arrivals (Holocene) in the Philippines, their languages would already resemble the languages of their neighbors in whatever part of Southeast Asia they came from, as would numerous items of their material culture. All groups in Southeast Asia (including so-called Negrito groups) have undergone change, and all groups throughout Southeast Asia have acquired most of the items of material culture that are the most efficient for their subsistence needs (including guns, in many instances), so no one should be surprised (or disappointed) that Negritos employ artifacts also found among their neighbors. All Pleistocene hominids were hunters and collectors, so why deny the commonly used hunting and collecting artifacts to the Negritos.

Unfortunately, the ethnographer cannot have it both ways. One can continue to look for pan-Negrito cultural manifestations or one can treat each cultural group as an entity and give each group the full treatment, i.e., a complete ethnographic accounting, as LeBar (1975) should have done. Look at some of the other groups LeBar (1964, 1975) has summarized and see how sparse the ethnographic data are; yet, he treated each group as an entity (except the Negritos, which he lumped together). Elizalde and Fox (1969) have tried to reject this procedure, but their protests have been ignored. We do not have to wait until a complete ethnography is compiled for each group to acknowledge the existence of the group. However, we can follow the lead of LeBar (1964, 1975) and describe each group as fully as is

possible from the existing literature. Then our anthropological colleagues, especially those in the Philippines and Malaya, will quickly be able to see what research still remains to be done. Maceda (1975) has already done the Mamanua; Fox (1952) has reported on the Pinatubo groups; Jean Peterson (1978) has described the Agta; and Eder (1977a, 1977b, 1978) has provided excellent descriptions of the Batak. The important aspect of this type of ethnography is that the summaries will have been written by people who have lived with the groups being described.

As for synthetic ethnography, LeBar has given up this type of work, so the field is wide open for the well-trained synthesizer of ethnographic data. We can use the models of LeBar (1964, 1975), but we cannot be satisfied with the low quality of "lumper" type anthropology. Yet, no one scholar can do it all by himself. We must enlist the cooperation of other scholars who have the same interests--especially those in the Philippines and Malaya. "Colonial anthropology," as described by Zamora (1976), may be coming to an end, but Euro-American and Filipino anthropologists must excise the racism from their work as well.

In old fashioned anthropology courses, students were taught about race, language, and culture; they also were taught that these concepts are independent variables that seldom travelled together. Yet, the traditional approach to the "Negritos" of the Philippines and the Malay Peninsula has demanded that this cluster of concepts always be found linked together.

Back to physical type--remember that taxonomy (in biology) is dependent upon phenotype (= what the organism looks like). What we need is a neutral descriptive term that means "short-statured Asian Black." This will eliminate the problem of hair type and will also eliminate the need to describe the group members by using the names of other groups, e.g., Veddoid, Papuan, etc., names of groups that are somewhere in the vicinity (and sometimes five thousand miles away).

The generalizations offered by previous investigators make interesting scientific fiction, but quality anthropology is based upon thorough ethnology and ethnography.

We must extract ourselves from the mire of the history of Negrito "studies" in the Philippines and other regions of Southeast Asia and adhere closely to the best ethnography. Rehashing the accounts of earlier investigators and reiterating the speculations of armchair anthropologists will not unravel the knotty problem. If there is a "pan-Negrito culture," it will be revealed after the high-quality ethnographies are compared (the method of cross-cultural comparison).

In the above narrative, I have tried to relate minority student attitudes to the content and methodology of traditional Southeast Asian area courses that have heavy anthropological components describing Asian black populations. As revealed by the selected examples, much of the anthropological literature is racist in content, and the methodology utilized by many ethnographers is also influenced by racism, even though the anthropologists may be unaware of the underlying racist factors that influence their observations and ethnographic accounts. However, lack of awareness on the part of the ethnographer does not justify the continuation of past practices. If anthropologists expect students to be attracted to their courses--minority students or otherwise--then they must have a good product. Racist ethnography has served its purpose in maintaining the stereotypic status quo, but it cannot be used to train perceptive and sensitized students.

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TABLE 1. SOUTHEAST ASIAN AREA COURSES IN ANTHROPOLOGY BY QUARTER, YEAR, AND STUDENT ETHNICITY.

COURSE NUMBER	QUARTER	YEAR	BLACK	FILIPINO	OTHER	NOTES
ANTH 267 = ASST 233	F	1975	0	0	3	
ANTH 268 = ASST 234	W	1976	1	0	5	
ANTH 268 = ASST 234	W	1977	2	0	5	
ANTH 369 = ASST 369	S	1977	0	0	1	
ANTH 267 = ASST 233	F	1977	1	2	2	(one Thai student)
ANTH 268 = ASST 234	S	1978	0	2	2	(one Thai student)
ANTH 268 = ASST 234	F	1978	0	3	5	(one Korean student)
ANTH 267 = ASST 233	S	1979	0	8	6	(one Japanese student)
ANTH 268 = ASST 234	W	1980	1	0	6	(one Chinese & one East Indian student)
ANTH 369 = ASST 369	S	1980	1	0	6	
ANTH 267 = ASST 233	S	1981	0	5	4	(one Iraqi student)
ANTH 369 = ASST 369	S	1981	0	0	1	(one East Indian student)
		TOTALS	6	20	46	